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FAITH THROUGH TIME

Archaeologists have discovered the remains of an ancient chapel within the nave of St Mary the Virgin Church in Ashford. The foundations of the early Norman chapel are thought to date from the late 11th century.

FULL STORY ON PAGE 9

■ BY ED HILL

CENTRAL government has said it will not make any money available for a massive lorry park near Aldington.

The planned park would hold thousands of vehicles during Operation Stack instead of using the inside lane of the M20 motorway.

Kent County Council has been pursuing the scheme since 2008, but has now been told by the Coalition the estimated £35 million cost would go over budget and is not affordable.

However, KCC is determined to press ahead with the idea, which could see up to 3,000 spaces built on the 70-acre site off Church Lane, relieving congestion on the M20 and A20 when HGV traffic builds up waiting to enter the Port of Dover.

In its published answer to a submitted bid for money by KCC, the Department of Communities and Local Government said: "In relation to the specific proposal to construct a lorry park in Kent, it is understood the costs are likely to greatly exceed £35m due to the need for significant works to construct a new junction off the motorway."

"The Highways Agency has no objection to the lorry park being created. However, Government funding is not available for this project."

In its original proposal, KCC said the site – between Aldington, Sellindge and Smeeth – was chosen for its good connections and closeness to the Channel Tunnel and Dover, and its distance from built-up areas. Ronald Lello, of the Sellindge and District Residents' Association said: "If you stop Channel traffic

CONTINUED ON PAGE 3



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SEE OUR SISTER PAPERS KENT ON SUNDAY AND THE SATURDAY EDITION FOR ALL THE WEEKEND'S COUNTY NEWS AND SPORT

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Do you want to find out more about your local NHS services in the community?

We are holding a showcase event, which gives you the opportunity to find out more about some of the 36 services we provide like community dentistry, physiotherapy and community nursing.

A question and answer session near the end of the Showcase will give you the chance to ask any burning questions to the directors that manage your community services.

Information about how social services, charities and local voluntary organisations can help you will also be available.

On 27 January 2011, starting at 11am and finishing at 1pm, the Showcase will be held at:

The Ark,
 Noah's Ark Road,
 Dover,
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Tel: 01304 225737



The Eastern and Coastal Kent Community Health NHS Trust Board Meeting in Public will also take place at The Ark on the same day starting at 1:30pm and closing at 4:30pm. Refreshments are provided between the Showcase and the Board Meeting.

Copies of the Board Papers are available on our website, please visit www.eckcommunityservices.nhs.uk.

For questions relating to the Board Meeting please contact Jill Mackenzie on 01233 667840 or email jill.mackenzie@eastcoastkent.nhs.uk.



CHANGE: Other retail units could be demolished to make way for the Sainsbury's extension

Superstore plans to double in size

EXPANSION plans for the Sainsbury's superstore at Warren Retail Park will be considered by Ashford council this week.

The revamped store would more than double its sales floor area by adding a second mezzanine level. Four retail units at the site will be demolished to allow for extra parking.

The expanded store would also include a restaurant on the second level and an Explore and Learn area where parents could leave their children while shopping.

The barn-style superstore would be radically changed, with a modern glass, timber and silver panelled facade. The entrance would also be moved to a more central location.

The plans also include a new cycle route. It will join the M20 footbridge which will soon be erected linking Warren Retail Park to Eureka Leisure Park on the other side of the M20.

Plans to expand the store had already been given the green light but the new designs mean the it will accommodate more goods and also an online shopping service. The store's filling station will also be enlarged.

Sainsbury's says it wants to expand to accommodate the town's growth. In a report to planning committee

■ **BY ED HILL**

members, the company says it has looked at other sites near Park Mall, Park Farm and in the undeveloped area of the town centre close to Elwick Road, but none is big enough.

Sainsbury's claims revamping the store will not have a major impact on trade in the town centre.

However, it has agreed to pay £100,000 towards a marketing scheme for the town centre and improvements to Park Mall, if it gets planning permission.

The supermarket chain says the new store could create more than 350 jobs, although some will be part time.

Simon Cole, planning policy manager for Ashford council, says in a report: "It would not have a significant effect on either existing comparison goods retailing in the town centre or the potential for future investment."

"This is important as the scheme should not be prejudicing the ability to bring forward key town centre development sites such as Elwick Place."

The planning committee will discuss the Sainsbury's plan tonight Wednesday. The planning officer has recommended approval of the application, although central government will also have to agree to the alterations.

Gran's world record

MIMI Anderson, the gran who attempted to run the furthest distance on a treadmill in seven days, has had her achievement confirmed by the Guinness Book of World Records.

She ran more than 400 miles in the food court of Ashford's designer outlet. Her citation reads: "The greatest distance run on a treadmill in one week by a female was 649.8km by Marina 'Mimi' Anderson (UK) at Ashford, Kent, UK, from October, 16-23, 2010."

The 48-year-old said: "I want to thank everyone who supported me - without you I certainly wouldn't have got the record."

Mrs Anderson raised £5,833.47 for Help for Heroes and appeared on Russell Howard's BBC3 Good News show after breaking the record.

Foiled robber sought

POLICE are hunting a would-be robber who punched his teenage victim in the face. The attack happened on the Essella Road footbridge, on Friday, December 10, at about 11pm.

A 17-year-old was walking with a friend when they noticed someone following them.

At the top of the steps they were confronted by a man, who kicked the victim's friend, then pushed him down the steps. The robber threatened the 17-year-old, demanded his money and phone, then punched him.

He ran towards Osbourne Road after being disturbed by another man walking along the bridge. The offender is white, in his late teens, about 6ft, slim, with short, light-brown hair.

He was wearing a black sleeveless body warmer, a dark long sleeved top, dark trousers and a black hat. Call police on 01622 690690 if you can identify him.

January sales boost

ASHFORD'S designer outlet has reported trading rose by more than a quarter over the Christmas and New Year holiday.

From December 26 to January 2, sales were up by 27 per cent compared with same period last year. McArthurGlen, which operates the centre, attributed the increase to shoppers aiming to beat the VAT rise.

Manager David Maddison said: "Many leading brands saw exceptional sales. December 26, 27 and 28 were peak sales days."

A rush for the sales was also reported by town centre stores. County Square saw a rise of more than ten per cent in one week.

100-bed hotel gets go-ahead

PLANS to build a 100-bed hotel near the Kimberley Way Asda have been given the go ahead by Ashford council.

The hotel is to be built on land just south of the supermarket and the designer outlet shopping centre.

Outline permission for a hotel in the area was granted 18 years ago as part of plans to build the International railway station.

Since then the land has been unused, although owners the Ashford Investor Partnership, did develop the designer outlet which opened more than ten years ago.

The hotel will comprise 100 beds and a restaurant that will also be open to the public.

The new design is smaller than the original plans which proposed a 160-bed hotel. It will consist of two storeys, making it about eight metres



GRANTED: Artist's depiction of planned hotel

high, and parking spaces for 84 vehicles, some of them underneath the building. Access will be from the roundabout already at Asda and a ramp over the Aylesford stream.

The hotel will have vertical wood cladding and a grass roof to help it blend in with the landscape.

Designers have also taken into account the fact the location is liable to flooding. Developers say there is growing need for more hotel rooms in

Ashford with the introduction of the high-speed train services and want the scheme built in time for the 2012 London Olympics.

Portfolio holder Cllr Richard Honey, in a report to the planning committee, said: "This is rather unusual, given that outline permission including the hotel was granted so long ago. I agree with officers that the site is relatively well served by buses and close to the railway station, as well as being within walking distance of the town centre."

"The hotel appears to be smaller than that which could be erected under outline planning permission."

"The design, sustainability, layout and landscaping are much improved and may well be acceptable."

Ecological matters will also need careful consideration."

Blood clot death inquest after Harvey discharge

■ BY ED HILL

AN INQUEST in Ashford has heard how a man discharged by doctors at the William Harvey Hospital died from a deep vein thrombosis despite being treated for the condition on the wards four days before.

Eric Evans, 79, collapsed on his doorstep last May and then died after being readmitted to intensive care.

The former agricultural foreman from New Romney had been admitted on May 22 suffering from breathlessness. He died on May 27 of a pulmonary embolism (blood clot in the lung) due to deep vein thrombosis (DVT).

He had been treated with anti-coagulant drugs to counter the dangers of clotting for two days when he was first sent into hospital but medics decided his condition was stable and he could go home.

The inquest on Thursday heard doctors discharged him so he could administer anti-clotting drugs himself or with the help of a district nurse. He had been driven from hospital by a friend, Clare Archer, but collapsed as he went into his home. Paramedics spent an hour resuscitating Mr Evans before returning him to the hospital, where he later died. Mr Evans' family, who were in court, asked why he had been sent home when he still appeared to be having difficulty with his breathing.

Dr Jonathan Hawkins, a consultant at the hospital who had treated Mr Evans when he



INQUEST: Pensioner Eric Evans died after doctors had discharged him from the William Harvey Hospital, above

was first admitted, said the outcome of such cases could be hard to predict. Mr Evans had not displayed the symptoms of someone who was about to suffer a serious deterioration and many patients could be treated at home once they had been made stable.

He said: "There is a small proportion of patients who will suddenly collapse.

"Breathlessness is just one feature of their condition. We were as confident as we could be that he could be successfully treated at home."

Coroner Rachel Redman said she was concerned that Mr Evans had not been given the anti-clotting drug, Clexane, when he left the hospital, to administer himself.

Dr Hawkins said he was also concerned and had asked the risk management team at the William Harvey to investigate the breakdown in communication between doctors, nurses and the pharmacy. However, he did not believe this contributed to Mr Evans' death because he had collapsed before the next dose of the drug should have been injected.

He said: "There always has to be a balance of risk. We make clinical judgements every day and have to assess patients. That does not mean we get it right 100 per cent all the time."

The coroner said she understood Mr Evans' family had concerns about his treatment but was satisfied that he had died of natural causes.

Report suggests taxi fare increase

TAXI fares could rise in the borough after a meeting of Ashford council's licensing committee.

A report on Hackney carriage fares recommended there be a three per cent increase for journeys and a 20p increase to the starting fare. That would mean the cost of a two-mile journey will rise from £5.40 to £5.80.

The report says the main reason for the rise is the increase in fuel prices.

The last time taxi fares rose was in 2009. Ashford has one of the lowest taxi rates in the county. One of the highest is in Tunbridge Wells, where a two-mile journey costs £6.20. The council says the increase will bring the borough in line with the average across Kent.

The rise only affects Hackney carriages in the borough. Private hire vehicles can set their own fares. Taxis can also charge less if they agree a fare beforehand, such as on a long journey, or a regular trip such as a school run.

The decision will be made at the meeting on January 17.

Cottage fire cats die

A FAMILY'S two pet cats died in a blaze at their Tenterden home.

Fire broke out at the cottage in Beachy Path on Wednesday night, last week. Damage was so severe the family of four have been put in temporary accommodation. They were out when the fire broke out but a neighbour heard the smoke alarm and dialled 999.

Fire crews from Tenterden and Cranbrook were sent to the cottage and broke down the door to gain access.

Watch manager Steve Parsons said: "Crews extinguished the fire within 20 minutes and stopped it spreading. Unfortunately, the damage was severe and the family lost their two cats."

Crews suspect the fire was caused by an electrical fault.



DISPUTE: KCC's Aldington lorry park site

Lorry park cash

CONTINUED FROM FRONT PAGE

for one day you're going to overflow any park and both sides of the motorway are still going to be used for Operation Stack because there are so many vehicles.

"It's not just the lorry park, but the infrastructure needed to go with it. What do you do with the sewage problem, and providing drivers with fresh water in one small area?"

Operation Stack is put in place when bad weather or industrial action leaves lorries unable to cross the Channel, leading to a lane of the M20 being closed around junctions 10 and 11 and traffic diverted, causing severe disruption.

KCC leader Cllr Paul Carter said in the light of the Government's announcement money could be raised from the private sector, including charging foreign lorries, or using money generated by the Dartford crossing.

Simon Foster, of the Lorry Park Alliance, which is campaigning against the plan, said: "The manner in which this is solved has to be different from what KCC is proposing. A single site for all the lorries would not work. All the communities of Kent need to be part of a solution."

Development of town given radical review in new borough plan

ASHFORD council has issued another plan showing suggested areas for development around the borough.

The Urban Sites and Infrastructure Development Plan Document (DPD) also shows two proposed urban extensions that could be developed to accommodate the town's growth.

It covers the period up to 2016 and identifies sites which could be built on not just for housing but also employment and recreation.

Areas allocated for development include key brownfield sites such as an extension to the Godinton Park estate, land adjoining the William Harvey Hospital, a new employment site at Sevington and a new strategic park at Conningbrook.

However, the plans are just part of a rethink about the future of development in the town announced recently by council leader Cllr Peter Wood.

A consultation stage will give residents and businesses the opportunity to comment on the plan before it is sent to central government.

The seven-week consultation ends

at 5pm on February 4. Simon Cole, policy manager for Ashford council, said: "This document is based on the current adopted core strategy and is only proposing to allocate a relatively small amount of new development in this plan up to 2016.

"The fundamental review into how much and where Ashford should grow in the longer term will take place in the core strategy review which is due to take place this year."

This latest DPD excludes the areas covered by the town centre and the two proposed major urban extensions at Cheeseman's Green and Chilmington Green.

For more details on the plan and to submit comments, go to www.ashford.gov.uk/planning_and_building_control/planning_now_and_in_the_future/urban_sites_dpd.aspx.

Officers from the planning department will be in County Square and at Ashford Gateway to explain the proposals.

They will be at County Square on Friday, January 21, and Ashford Gateway, in Park Mall, on Saturday, January 22.

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Pub and gardeners will benefit from allotment deal for field

■ BY ED HILL

A PUB in Brabourne Lees, near Ashford, is helping to tackle the shortage of allotments for people who want to grow their own veg.

The Plough Inn has a disused field behind the children's play area. The pub's owner, Shepherd Neame, has agreed with the local parish council to lease the land to local people.

Sue Wood, parish council clerk, said: "We were approached by a couple of residents who said they would like to have some allotments in the village. We went to the company and we were delighted that they were happy to do it. We now have a five-year lease, with the option of another five years and a further 10 after that."



DIGGING IN: Prospective allotment holders keen to start

Television shows such as Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall's River Cottage series mean there is growing interest from the public who want to garden, but the demand means allotments are increasingly hard to find. In Ashford there is a huge waiting list for council plots, with some

people having to wait years.

Forty people attended a meeting in Brabourne about the new plots, with 22 already signed up to take one on. Work on preparing the ground is expected to start soon.

The pub's managers also hope it will be an opportunity for them to source more local produce for their restaurant.

Licensee Sally Duncan, who runs The Plough Inn with her daughter Bonnie, said: "While we will have our own allotment, we are also hoping the locals will sell us some of their vegetables."

This is the second time Shepherd Neame has made land available for allotments. A similar scheme was launched at the Harrow pub in Knockholt, near Sevenoaks, earlier this year.

Mrs Wood said: "There is talk of setting up an allotment society, and those who have had allotments are offering their skills to those who haven't. It is a fabulous community project."

Make contacts at group's free lunch

BUSINESSMEN and women are more aware than most that there is "no such thing as a free lunch" – but now there is.

The Ashford chapter of the networking organisation BNI is inviting non-members to a three-course networking lunch at the Wife of Bath restaurant in Wye.

"Businesses know how important networking is, and BNI is the leading organisation of its kind, but not everyone can join us for our early morning breakfasts," explained Chapter Director Simon Webster, managing director of Facts & Figures Financial Planners Ltd.

"That's why we decided to invite non-members to join us for lunch from 12.30pm on Friday, January 21."

For business people who want to sample a normal BNI meeting, guests are welcome to attend the breakfast meetings at the Ashford International Hotel at 6.30am on Wednesdays.

To sign up for the lunch, or for an invitation to a Wednesday meeting, call Zoe Rushforth on 01233 660481 or 07801 061120 or email her at zoe@uminatedesign.co.uk.



SEEKING PURR-FECT HOME

TWO cats with traumatic pasts are looking for a new home for the new year.

Tracy and Beth are being cared for at the Ashford RSPCA cat centre in Station Road.

Tracy, left, was brought into the cattery after she was nearly run over at the golf course in Great Chart. The five-year-old black cat was underweight, but thanks to the staff at the centre she is now a healthy weight. Staff say she will need an experienced cat owner in an adult-only household where she is the only pet.

Seven-year-old Beth was rescued by RSPCA inspectors from a caravan in Hastings. The black and white cat had a bad flea infestation and had lost a lot of fur. After a lot of treatment and care she is healthy again and would be best suited to an adult-only household without any other cats.

Centre manager Leslie Young said: "These two gorgeous cats have been with us for a while. They don't show their best sides here in the cattery as they don't like other cats, but we think if someone took a chance on them that they could make amazing pets."

If you think you can re-home Tracy or Beth call 01233 646855 or log on to www.rspca-ashford-district.org.uk

Soccer scheme marks anniversary

A SCHEME to help young football players become the next Pelé or Ronaldo is celebrating its 10th year.

The Brazilian Soccer Schools (BSS) started in Leeds in 1996 and was brought to the town by Ashford council's football development officer Ben Moyle. It is now one of the country's longest-running BSS franchises.

Since then, thousands of children have benefited from coaching based on methods used by five-time World Cup winners Brazil.

What started with a handful of children in three primary schools in Hamstreet, Great Chart and Tenterden in February, 2001, has grown to more than 50 classes a week. Many participants have gone on to play at a high

level. Of the four Ashford players accepted on to Gillingham FC's scholarship scheme in 2008, three were graduates of BSS Ashford.

The anniversary celebrations kick off with a Mini Soccer Tournament at Pitchside in Stanhope on Saturday, January 22. The tournament is open to all Under 7, 8, 9 and 10 teams in Ashford, for £15 per team.

On February 24, there will be a free open access day, where young people aged 7-19 from Stanhope can turn up at Courtside, Stanhope Road, between 10pm and 1pm, and take part in organised matches. Further celebrations will take place at half-term.

For more information, contact Ben Moyle or Emma Knight on 01233 896511.

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yourlocalinterview

QUESTION & ANSWER

CAROLINE HALLETT



Q Can you tell us a little about yourself?

A I am regional coordinator for the Food For Life Partnership. I live in Folkestone but work throughout the South East so see a lot of the M20 and the M25. I am married with two grown-up children.

Q What is Food For Life and how did you get involved?

A The Food For Life Partnership is a network of schools and communities committed to transforming food culture. We are revolutionising school meals, reconnecting young people with farms and inspiring families and communities to cook and grow food. The partnership brings together four charities: the Soil Association, Focus On Food, Health Education Trust and Garden Organic. It empowers schools, teachers, caterers, food-producers, pupils and health professionals to create a better food culture for young people across England. This means a school-meals service serving healthy and sustainable food, practical food education and engaged pupils.

Q What are the advantages of growing your own?

A We encourage people to reconnect with food by growing organic or buying from local farmers and suppliers. Organic food is grown without the use of man-made chemicals. The same is true for organic meat. One of

the first things people notice when switching to organic is the taste, which is much better.

The most obvious advantage is safety. Pesticides and other chemicals are sprayed on inorganic food. Many fungicides and insecticides are potentially carcinogenic. With organic, the soil is not contaminated.

Q You are reaching out to schools to spread the message

A We have more than 400 schools across the South East enrolled in the programme. These are setting up gardens, getting young people cooking and growing, and visiting farms and businesses to understand more about food and where it comes from. We offer an award scheme and have gold-, silver- and bronze-award-winning schools.

Q Will the trend towards carbon reduction aid your cause?

A Absolutely. When we think about carbon footprints we tend to concentrate on how much energy we use directly, in our homes or travelling. This makes up our primary footprint, but environmental impact doesn't stop there. Food miles and packaging produce a secondary footprint.

Over-packaged items and food brought over large distances all add to our carbon contribution. Saving energy – and lowering emissions – isn't only about changing light-bulbs and switching off appliances.

Q Are supermarkets a help or hindrance to local produce?

A Large supermarkets don't supply schools with raw ingredients. We have had a positive response to our campaign from school-meals caterers who are applying for our Catering Mark and using 50 per cent locally-sourced ingredients. We encourage parents to use local suppliers and organic-veg-box schemes, but all the large supermarkets carry organic ranges now.

Q What is the future for food distribution and choice?

A The way food is distributed nationally has production, consumption and trading practices that destroy the environment, harm animals and are deeply unjust. I would like a return to local-food-hubs, with enough produced locally for all. It is madness to have only three or four large 'food factories' for staples.

Q Where can people find out more?

A Check out www.foodforlife.org.uk, or email me via chalet@soilassociation.org.uk.

Q What do you like to do in your spare time?

A I have a variety of hobbies, including arts and crafts, cooking and walking. I love entertaining and relaxing with friends.

Q & A

The Kent co-ordinator of the Food For Life Partnership speaks to **James Alexandre** about transforming school meals, reducing carbon miles and what organic produce means for the future of our food supplies

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Norman chapel revealed beneath floor of church

■ BY ED HILL

ARCHAEOLOGISTS have discovered the remains of an ancient chapel within the nave of St Mary the Virgin Church.

The foundations of the early Norman chapel are thought to date as far back as the late 11th century. Archaeologists made the discovery during excavations of the church floor as part of major refurbishment works.

Andy Linklater, of Canterbury Archaeological Trust, who is carrying out the dig, said: "Whilst a church at Ashford is mentioned in the Domesday Book (c.1086), its exact whereabouts have, until now, been largely speculative. As archaeologists, we would expect continuity of a consecrated site, but hard evidence is always better than folklore or supposition."

St Mary the Virgin Church is undergoing a facelift to improve worship for churchgoers and increase its role as an arts centre for the town.

Work on the church's £1.7million makeover began in October. The Church of England is refurbishing the parish church with new seating, lights, a performance area, better access and entrances, and more toilets, to suit both religious and secular events and services.

Because of the extent of the groundwork being carried out, almost the entire west end of



EARLY WORSHIP: The foundations of the Norman chapel revealed by excavations of the floor at St Mary the Virgin Church

the nave floor has been made available for examination, giving the archaeologists an unusually large area to work with.

Mr Linklater added: "The project has enabled us to examine the masonry foundations of the church, and has led us to reassess the development of the church."

"The present St Mary's has always been regarded as being a single phase of reconstruction, instigated by Sir John Fogge, the then Lord of the Manor of Ashford, towards the close of the 15th century."

"Whilst the western half of the church has undergone at least two major phases of

enlargement during the 19th century – consisting of widening and lengthening the nave and aisles – the footprint of a smaller, possibly early Norman church has been uncovered beneath the present nave."

The Norman church can be identified by the masonry wall foundation and a robber trench, aligned between the two aisle arcades.

Work on St Mary's is expected to be finished by the summer next year.

The £1.7m project is led by the Church of England, and includes £1.2m of growth area funding from Ashford's Future, and £100,000 from Ashford council.

Closure of court 'will leave big hole in county'

THE Chairman of Kent Magistrates Association has said Ashford will be deprived a court for no good reason.

Chris Stanley said: "We thought we had put up a good case to save Ashford and it will leave a big hole in the middle of Kent. Ashford has some of the best communication links in the county."

The court in Tufton Street could close in a year, after the latest announcement from the Ministry of Justice.

It had been hoped the building, which also includes a county court, might have been saved after consultation with local magistrates, solicitors and stakeholders, but the arguments for keeping it open appear to have fallen on deaf ears.

The Magistrates Association, along with solicitors and councillors, argued closing Dover's court would be better.

Mr Stanley said: "We accept that cuts have to be made. Dover is very little used and could be closed, making a considerable saving."

The Ministry of Justice hopes to save about £80 million by closing 148 magistrate and county courts.

Ashford's large number of legal firms seems to have had little impact on the decision.

Mr Stanley said: "They recently renewed their legal aid contract. When Ashford closes they will have to travel to either Canterbury or Folkestone. The Court services' calculation on savings does not take that into consideration, or the extra time witnesses and victims will have to spend travelling."

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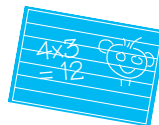
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QHOTELS



BREAK TIME



HOSPITALITY: Elderly tuck in to Christmas dinner

Pupils dish up festive treat for the elderly

RESIDENTS at three local care homes benefitted from a visit to the Towers School just before Christmas.

Food was prepared by hospitality and catering pupils at the school's Carters restaurant and ASDAN.

Students, who can gain a GCSE equivalent qualification by taking part in extra-curricular activities, served the meals.

Residents at the The Grange, St Valery and Heathfield care homes were also entertained by students singing numbers from their production of Joseph and his Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat, along with carols.

Throughout the year the ASDAN group raised money for good causes and to buy small gifts for the visitors.

Website development

THE North School is currently having a makeover of its website.

The home page has a message from the school's headteacher Lesley Ellis outlining the schools key principles.

In her closing statement she says: "Each student is special and it is this key value that enables us to achieve a quality education based around an outstanding curriculum. We seek to develop the skills, talents and interests of all our students as individuals within a supportive and caring environment."

Roar of appreciation for pupils' musical efforts

■ BY ED HILL

STUDENTS at Highworth Grammar School recently performed a series of musicals for fellow students.

It was all part of the Performing Arts Learning Community's annual show.

Highworth is a music specialist school and the show is part of a competition between various groups of students who produce their own excerpts from stage shows giving them a chance to highlight their performance skills.

Six groups (communities) take part to perform in front of year seven and eight students in November and then a trophy is awarded to the overall winners.

This year the pupils performed extracts from Hairspray, School of Rock, Wizard of Oz, Little Mermaid, Beauty and the Beast and Mamma Mia.

Razzmatazz

Assistant head (English), Lesley Donald, said: "As a music specialist school, the Performing Arts competition always rates highly in our calendar and students rise to the challenge of producing their own shows with real razzmatazz."

"After weeks of sleepless nights and hours of rehearsals, we finally reached the big day. Years seven and eight had a fantastic morning watching the performances. Students and staff alike were impressed by the high standards of all the performances."

"Not only did we enjoy the quality of acting, singing and dancing, we were equally delighted by the time, effort and detail which went



Picture: ALEX HESKETH/HELIX

MONSTER MATCH: Dame Kiri Te Kanawa community impressed with their adaptation of Beauty and the Beast

into the props, programmes and costumes. It was particularly pleasing to see so many of our younger students taking part and clearly having a great time."

The competition even had a mention on the Chris Evans' Breakfast Show that wished the students good luck for the performance.

The overall winning group was the Dame Kiri Te Kanawa community who impressed

the judges with their clever and witty adaptation of Beauty and The Beast.

Individual prizes are also given to performers as well.

Year nine students Amber and Amy who were in the chorus of Beauty and the Beast said: "When we heard the result, we screamed. It was fantastic we felt a real sense of achievement after all our hard work."

SEND your schools news and pictures to yourashford@kosmedia.co.uk. You can also upload your video clips of schools events on to www.yourkenttv.co.uk

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Page 29



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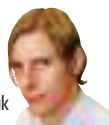
MUSIC/GETAWAYS 20

WEATHER 18

EVENTS 16

INTERVIEW 14

LEISURE 13-20



DAY & NIGHT

Beautiful ballet show

CINDERELLA by Ballet Theatre UK is at the Hazlitt Theatre, Maidstone, on Saturday, January 29, at 7.30pm.

The rags-to-riches story features Prokofiev's uplifting score together with sumptuous costumes. The sets conjure up a magical fantasy world in this enchanting production.

Tickets are £18, concessions £15. To book call 01622 758611 or visit www.hazlittartscentre.co.uk.

The thrill of the circus

FROM January 11 to 15, the big top of Moscow State Circus will arrive at the Churchill Theatre.

Performers are bringing the sensational new show *Legenda* to Bromley for the first time. It is sure to thrill, astound and shock audiences of all ages with its blend of classical and contemporary circus.

Presenting a huge cast of Russia's greatest circus artistes, the Moscow State Circus is bursting with incredible human feats and death-defying acts, with state of the art special effects and performers who push the boundaries of physical ingenuity.

But tickets by calling 08448 717620, or at www.ambassadorstickets.com/bromley.

Laughter with Marlon

STAND-up comedian Marlon Davis will be making audiences laugh at the Hazlitt Theatre in Maidstone on Wednesday, February 2.

The young comedian, improviser, actor and presenter bursts on to the stage like a breath of fresh air, with an impish grin, boyish enthusiasm and an effortlessly open, confident style.

He appeared in *Brown-Eyed Boy* on MTV and won the FHM Search For A Stand-Up Hero competition in 2009.

Tickets are £10. Over 18s only.

See www.hazlittartscentre.co.uk or call 01622 758611 to book.

Tune in to war time

ISLA St Clair comes to the Horsebridge centre in Whitstable on Friday, at 7.30pm.

The Eyes Front show is an exciting combination of live performance and film about the effect of music in wartime with the singer and broadcaster.

Isla St Clair, will present and perform a selection of popular songs and tell the stories behind them.

Visit www.islastclair.com for details.

Tickets are £10 or £9 concessions from the box office on 01227 281174.

Tony shares his politics

VETERAN parliamentarian Tony Benn comes to the Gulbenkian Theatre in Canterbury for one of his popular speaking dates.

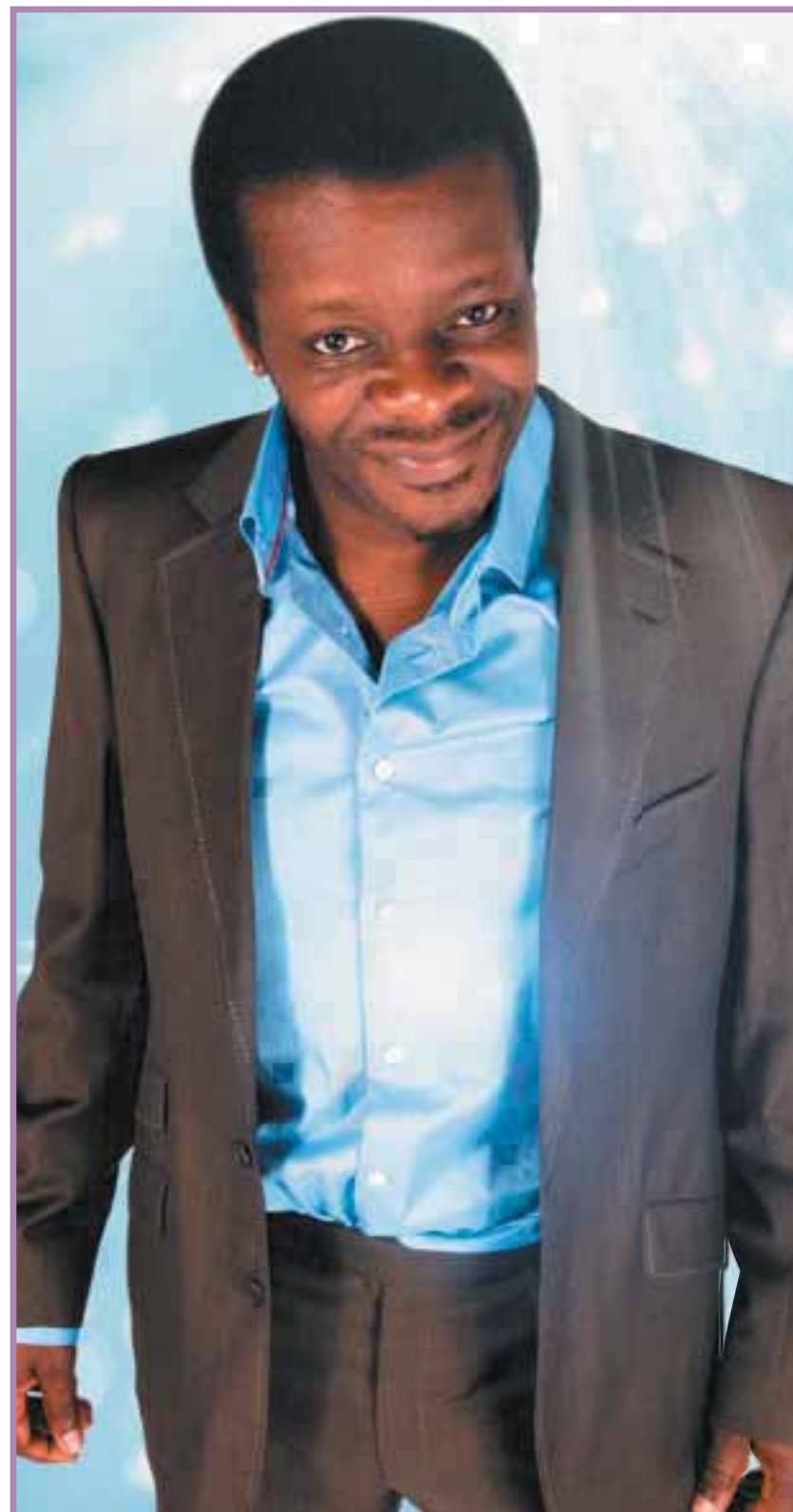
An Evening with Tony Benn, on Friday, January 21, will see the lauded left winger recall many anecdotes from his distinguished career.

He'll talk about his life in politics and what he thinks about the changes in the Labour party.

Expect an evening of frank responses and entertaining political anecdotes in the long awaited sequel to his original legendary theatre tour.

For tickets (£18) call 01227 769075 or visit www.kent.ac.uk/gulbenkian.

Laughter is the best medicine



STEPHEN K AMOS

Tuesday, January 18
Gulbenkian Theatre, Canterbury



STEPHEN K Amos is experiencing the biggest boom of his career.

The comedian has recently been starring in his own self-titled TV show on BBC Two and is seen as one of the brightest new stars in the comedy firmament.

And now he's bringing his *The Best Medicine* show to Canterbury.

"I'm feeling good about life right now," he said. "I was really flattered that the BBC saw fit to give me the chance to do my own show, in this day and age if you are a comic on TV you don't always get that platform to show all the different things you can do, so I saw it as a real great opportunity to show a bit more of myself."

The Stephen K Amos show went out on BBC Two on Friday nights at 10pm, but the series ended in the run up to Christmas.

Stephen said of what he wanted to achieve with it: "I kind of hark back to the old style of Dave Allen with the feel of the show. It's quite gentle and I embrace the variety nature of shows like that as I didn't think that kind of thing was happening as much on TV anymore, so to help to try and revive it is something that it's great to be involved with."

"I didn't want to do another bog-standard stand-up show. With that in mind we threw in some sketches, some bits with the audience and then some musical acts that you might not see on things like Michael McIntyre's Comedy Roadshow. I just wanted to throw some more in there to mix it up a bit."

Stephen turned to comedy 15 years ago but never thought he'd make a career out of it.

He said: "I was studying law at the time but decided I'd try my hand at stand-up and simply haven't stopped. It was never part of my plan to live this life. I wanted to be a lawyer and see where that took me."

"I'd never tried stand-up before, or any comedy and never been to a comedy club, so to me it was like a totally new medium."

"I just took the attitude from the start that it was all about having fun on stage and not being too fearful of it."

"That was probably helped initially by the fact that at the early shows a lot of my friends turned up. They found me funny anyway, but they obviously couldn't be there every time I had a show and so they started to stop coming. But the laughs continued and I decided to keep it going."

"People always say to me it must be the most petrifying thing to do, but the worst that can happen is that people don't laugh. It might be uncomfortable for a while but you're not going to die. There's usually a lot of goodwill in audiences too. Most people go to comedy nights to laugh, they want to laugh."

Stephen promises that his touring show is very different to his TV work.

"This is live, unedited and in the moment. I try and keep it as fresh as possible. If something that is new material to me feels right I will do it and try it out. I try not to stick too rigidly to any script."

Stephen begins his tour in mid-January and says that he believes comedy is having a real renaissance at the moment.

"It's absolutely going through a boom time. That's got to be a good thing. I think we've all had enough of celebrity chefs. There was a time when you couldn't turn on the TV without seeing one, but that seems to have died off a little."

"People want to have a laugh when they get home. There are other art forms and stand-up comedy really is one worth putting on TV."

• For tickets (£13 each) to see Stephen in Canterbury, Book at www.kent.ac.uk/gulbenkian or call 01227 769075.



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THE FUNNY SIDE COMEDY CLUB

Wednesday, January 26, Gulbenkian Theatre, Canterbury



FUNNY Side Comedy Club nights take place once a month on Wednesdays in the theatre building on the University of Kent campus.

Three top acts, usually Comedy Store regulars, are introduced by our compere in the comfortable surroundings of the Cafe Bar.

This month Kevin Precious introduces vein popping Mark Walker; endearing Diane Morgan; and loveable Eddy Brimson, pictured.

Mark Walker has fronted a rock band and worked as a pebble dasher. He now finds himself living in London and working the comedy circuit.

He is vocally and physically

dynamic with his performance, in which he combines life with surrealism to become a living embodiment of his daydreams.

Diane Morgan, a former actress, is one half of acclaimed comedy sketch duo Two Episodes of Mash and has won numerous awards and praise.

Eddy Brimson is a familiar face on the UK comedy circuit and is a regular at such prestigious venues as Jongleurs, Banana Cabaret, Belfast Empire and London's notorious Up the Creek.

Advance tickets are £8, or you can pay £10 on the door on the night. Encore Gulbenkian members and student advance tickets are £6, or £8 on the door.



PUNT AND DENNIS



Saturday, January 15 and Thursday, January 20, Gulbenkian Theatre, Canterbury

GOOD friends and important fixtures on the British comedy scene for decades, it's been three years since Punt and Dennis last toured the UK.

There is, therefore, no excuse for not writing a brand-new show and getting out on the road... so they have.

Hugh Dennis has catapulted in popularity following his role in the award-winning Outnumbered, as the obnoxious GP Piers Crispin in My Hero, and with his quick-witted quips as a regular panellist on Mock the Week, and Steve Punt has worked just as hard and often.

They've come a long way since being bit part players on Jasper Carrot's show Canned Carrot.

Both have enjoyed continued success in the award-winning and acclaimed BBC Radio 4 programme The Now Show.

Expect ridiculous mimes, great impressions, political satire and maybe the odd nursery rhyme.

Tickets are £18.50 or £16.50 for members of Encore! Gulbenkian. Over 16s only.

Call 01227 769075 or visit www.kent.ac.uk/gulbenkian to book tickets or for further information.

ALADDIN

Until January 23, various times,
Leas Cliff Hall, Folkestone



IT MAY seem like a little too late to be thinking about going to see a pantomime, but performers in Folkestone are still very much at it.

The annual Leas Cliff Hall panto, Aladddin, features a brand new set, talented cast and plenty of catchy show tunes that you'll be singing until February half term.

Folkestone's favourite panto stars will take to the stage, Paul Ketley and Neil Hunnisett will have you in stitches with their hilarious antics as Widow Twankey and Wishee Washee, while Natalie Hubbard will keep an eye on proceedings as PC Pongo. The evil Abanazar is played by Bob Osborne so get ready to boo and hiss.

Aladdin himself is played by Callum Erskine who has starred in the Youth Community Theatre Project Productions of Wizard of Oz



and Fame. Ellie Fiore, 17, is Princess Jasmine.

Join Aladdin, Princess Jasmine and of course Wishee Washee and Widow Twankey as they take you

on a magic carpet ride for a spectacular pantomime.

Tickets start at £13 plus booking fee, from www.leascliffhall.org.uk or call 0844 847 1776.



JIM MULLEN AND HENRY LOWTHER



Thursday, January 20, Tower Theatre, Folkestone

JAZZ AT the Tower presents one of the great duos of British jazz, for a show not to be missed.

Jim Mullen is deemed to be one of the world's foremost jazz guitarists, he will team up with Henry Lowther to recreate their studio recordings.

Mullen began his musical career playing tea chest bass in a skiffle group and soon progressed to guitar.

He was a member of a group with future Average White Band members Malcom Duncan and Roger Ball for a time and in 1975 hooked up with Dick Morrissey, followed by a host of top American artists.

His playing partner during the 60s, Henry Lowther was one of the first musicians on the British jazz scene to experiment with total free improvisation, notably with Jack Bruce, Lyn Dobson and Jon Hiseman.

He played with the original, seminal Mike Westbrook band and even hit the rock scene in the 60s.

Lowther will play the flugelhorn as well as the trumpet and be backed by Alex Keen on double bass and Rod Brown on drums.

Entrance on the evening is £7, call 01303 277175 to book or for more information.

THANET ON FILM: RAMSGATE SPECIAL



Thursday, January 13, Granville Cinema, Ramsgate

A SPECIAL Ramsgate edition of the phenomenally popular Thanet On Film will get its first screening this week.

The film, which broke box office records when it was screened in Broadstairs last year, is giving Ramsgate the big screen treatment in response to public demand.

Producer Christine Tongue said: "Over the last 12 months, many people from Ramsgate have asked that us to show the film in the town. However, we waited until we had time to put together a special Ramsgate edition.

"The film now includes extra vintage footage from the 1920s, 50s and 70s, as well as more recent times. There are lots of nostalgic shots of the beach, the attractions and the summer crowds. Over all it gives a fascinating impression of how Ramsgate has changed since its holiday heyday."

A special feature of the film is an item on Ramsgate seafront and the old Pleasurama site, which has been derelict for a decade.

Christine said: "The film tells the long saga of big promises and prolonged dereliction which has bedevilled Ramsgate seafront for so many years now."

Booking is advisable on 01843 591750.



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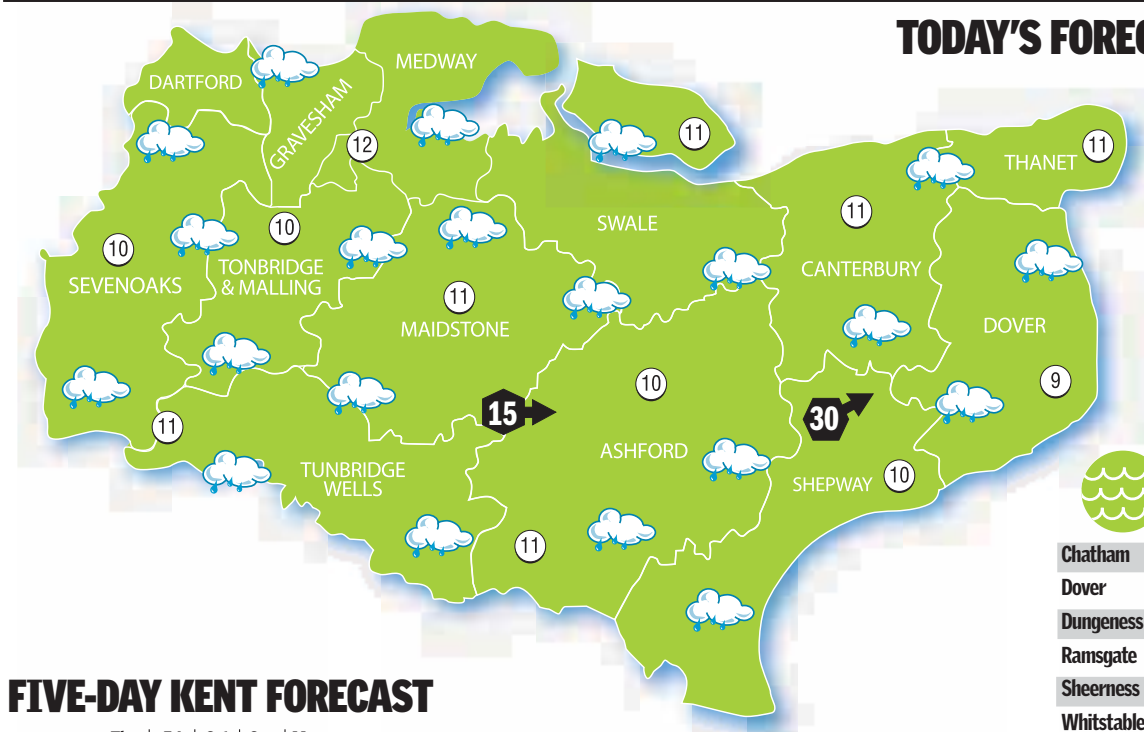
AROUND THE WORLD YESTERDAY

Amsterdam	3°C	Madrid	8°C
Athens	14°C	New York	1°C
Barcelona	14°C	Paris	7°C
Beijing	-2°C	Rome	15°C
Bombay	31°C	Sydney	25°C
Cape Town	23°C	Tenerife	21°C
Cardiff	8°C	Tokyo	5°C
Gibraltar	15°C	Vancouver	4°C
Hong Kong	14°C	Warsaw	2°C
Las Palmas	21°C	Wellington	18°C



KENT'S WEEKEND HIGH TIDES

Chatham	Saturday	8:03am 4.7m	Sunday	9:18am 4.8m
Dover	Saturday	6:33am 5.3m	Sunday	7:45am 5.4m
Dungeness	Saturday	6:47am 6.1m	Sunday	7:53am 6.2m
Ramsgate	Saturday	7:03am 4.0m	Sunday	8:15am 4.1m
Sheerness	Saturday	7:51am 4.6m	Sunday	9:06am 4.7m
Whitstable	Saturday	7:45am 4.4m	Sunday	9:08am 4.5m



FIVE-DAY KENT FORECAST

	Thur	Fri	Sat	Sun	Mon															
Ashford	7°C	12°C	11°C	11°C	11°C	Dover	6°C	10°C	10°C	9°C	9°C	Gravesend	8°C	12°C	13°C	12°C	11°C	Sevenoaks	6°C	11°C
Canterbury	7°C	11°C	11°C	10°C	10°C	Faversham	8°C	11°C	12°C	11°C	10°C	Maidstone	8°C	12°C	12°C	11°C	11°C	Sittingbourne	8°C	11°C
Chatham	8°C	11°C	12°C	11°C	10°C	Folkestone	6°C	10°C	10°C	9°C	9°C	Ramsgate	7°C	11°C	11°C	10°C	10°C	Tonbridge	7°C	12°C
Dartford	8°C	12°C	13°C	12°C	11°C	Gillingham	8°C	11°C	12°C	11°C	10°C	Rochester	8°C	11°C	12°C	11°C	10°C	Tun Wells	7°C	12°C



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MOONRISE 10:34am MOONSET 12:20am

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yourmusic

Enjoy live music at the Grey Lady



TALENT: Paul Dunton invites a variety of local musicians to perform on his nights

■ BY SIMON ROBINSON

PAUL Dunton is a man who likes to make things happen, and he is proof that a bit of initiative can go a long way.

His efforts have been key in helping to establish a scene for quality music in Tunbridge Wells.

The Grey Lady Music Lounge in the Pantiles has been a venue for music for ten years now, since its reopening.

Paul is one of the artists who has helped it become a runaway success with his candlelit show-cases for those who have something to say with their music.

A musician himself, the story started when Paul found himself a regular on the bill.

He said: "The owner offered me a residency on a weekly basis as an artist, and I was really flattered and accepted. It was quite out of the blue for me and it started out on Wednesday nights, with me playing there once a week and carried on that way for a while.

"But after a while I decided to turn it into something else."

Five years ago the Paul Dunton and Guests nights began in earnest and the interest has grown, becoming a platform for solo artists and acoustic bands to play to appreciative audiences.

He said: "The idea was to invite others to get involved.

"I wasn't sure that me alone playing every week was enough to sustain an interest, and I knew that to keep it fresh it needed others to get involved.

"Pretty soon word really seemed to get around, to the point where it was growing organically. Then after about six months or so, CDs started to arrive in the

post for me to listen to. That's how the roster built up and now we have four acts that play each night and it has become a twice weekly thing."

He continued: "The standard of musicianship and songwriting ability is excellent, of a real high standard, and we offer that for just £5.

"It's worth coming along as I think it's a great night and people are supporting local artists.

"I haven't really encountered a lot of negativity towards the nights as yet, despite them going for five years and it's something I want to continue with for some time as it has had such a good reception. It has become an integral part of the local music scene and it really is packed out twice a week. If the appetite for it is there I see no reason to stop doing it and I hope people will continue to support it."

Before long the 32-year-old found himself at the centre of a small scene that was growing each week as more and more demos turned up for him.

More bands and acts then started to ask for audition sessions to try and get on the bill at the Grey Lady.

"It took me by surprise but it was a welcome surprise. The scene in Tunbridge Wells has a lot to offer, I've really discovered that and believe in what people here are doing."

Paul's own music is what he calls a cross between classical and pop and when he plays he performs with a violinist, cellist and other musicians.

He cites singer/songwriter Damian Rice as one influence and composer Samuel Barber as another and has been playing ten years now.



HIGH SPEED TO THE SLOPES: These days you can take a couple of days off work and be on the piste within hours of arriving at the airport

yourgetaways



It's easy to take a few days off work and hit the slopes

■ BY SARAH O'MEARA

ONCE a luxurious adventure suitable only for James Bond, families with hyphenated surnames and tax dodgers, skiing has now become a great holiday choice for everyone.

But it's only in the last few years that new, innovative holiday companies have started toying with the limitations of the 70s-style week package and giving more choice to those who want to ski frequently, for short periods – and not much money.

You can now nip off for three days skiing, two nights sleep, at a relatively low price, in order to keep those ski legs fresh.

And having headed to the slopes with Skiweekender.com, I can confirm that during the course of one weekend, the turnover of guests at their lodge near the resort of La Clusaz, just an hour from Geneva, is dizzying.

"It is more work," admits Jess Shirley-Smith from the website, over a beer, at the end of a long day working at Les Aravis lodge.

"Our aim is to make sure not a minute of a guest's time is wasted."

Sure enough, we were on the slopes within two hours of arriving at Geneva airport and could immediately see the benefits of this kind of trip. Arriving mid-week for a short stay in March, the airport was quiet, and with our ski passes and



equipment organised in advance, we were propelled effortlessly on to the deserted slopes by the grinning, youthful Skiweekender staff.

Instead of being part of the weekend rush, we had the chance to ski like locals and found fighting the fatigue a little easier than normal with the help of blasting fresh air, exercise and a biere, s'il vous plait.

"Staffing this kind of lodge is expensive," says Jess, hours later, when we're back in the lodge and plonked beside the bar.

"Chalets tend to be run by couples, so it's a different business model, but we work it out so the costs aren't passed on to the customer. French hotels won't do it this way; that's one of the reasons we ended up buying this hotel ourselves."

Skiweekender.com offer a wide range of packages to suit the individual, rather than the needs of a tour operator:

"We make sure everything is on tap as soon as guests get here," says Jess. "The boots, lift passes, rides to the lifts – all those things which usually hold you up. And you also pay for these up front, rather than getting there and suddenly wondering where 300 euros went."

"For us, the internet and Easyjet are key," laughs Jess. "People like the idea they can take a day or two off work and they're down the slopes. We see people coming back again and again. One guy has been three times, and blames his skiing addiction on us. Apparently we make made it too easy."

MOTORS NEWS



Zero per cent on the new C4 from the off

CITROËN'S stylish new C4 went on sale this week, priced from £15,595 and with zero per cent finance deals offered straight away.

Available in five-door format only for now, the new car's compact external dimensions contrast with generous internal volumes and a class-leading 408-litre boot.

The French marque has also gone upmarket with the cabin and there are luxury options such as Denon hi-fi and massaging front seats.

Powertrain options include four low-emission diesel and three petrol engines – the latter developed with BMW.



New junior Audi wins top award for safety

AUDI'S new A1 supermini has earned the ultimate safety accolade – a maximum five-star Euro NCAP rating for frontal, rear or side collision, as well as for child safety and pedestrian protection.

It makes the A1 one of the safest small cars around and delivers further ammunition for its battle with fellow premium contender, the BMW Mini, and Fiat's retro star 500.

The most junior Audi is priced from £13,145 and the engine options are turbocharged 1.2 and 1.4-litre petrol units, plus a 1.6-litre diesel.



Jazzed up Honda deals

HONDA'S British-built Jazz and Civic line-ups have gained from New Year customer savings and offers.

The Jazz (from £9,950) is now available with £1,000 off all models, while the Civic line-up now starts at £12,995 and with savings of up to £2,750.

Other incentives include three years' complimentary servicing on most Civics, tempting new finance deals and the return of Honda's popular 50/50 plan for the Jazz – customers pay half the cost of the car on collection and the balance a year later.



IMPRESSIVE: Peugeot says its RCZ coupé is not aimed at giving the likes of the Audi TT a run for their money, but a stunning drive, comfortable interior and host of extras give it a chance

Peugeot's audacious bid to lionize classy coupé

IF PROOF were needed of Peugeot's new ambition to climb the world's car rankings, look no further than the stunning RCZ coupé.

The Audi TT is the most obvious target for the audacious Peugeot, except that the TT (from £26,475) is more expensive and more minimally equipped than the RCZ (from £20,450).

The upmarket RCZ GT HDi 163 (£25,550) model tested was laden with standard 'extras' such as powered and heated front seats, leather upholstery, parking aids and stunning alloys, and turned heads wherever it was seen.

You even get folding rear seats, allowing the rear of the cabin to be crammed far more than you would expect with that curvaceous roof.

And it steers and handles as crisply as it looks, aided by a tidy six-speed manual change. Sports car purists might moan that it's not rear-wheel drive, but that would have hiked the cost.

And it feels light yet well planted, particularly with the test car's smooth 163bhp 2.0-litre diesel engine.

There is no penalty to pay for the car's ability

ROAD TEST PEUGEOT RCZ

BY STEVE LOADER

STAR QUALITY

Driving appeal	★★★★★
Image	★★★★★
Space	★★★★★
Value	★★★★★
Running costs	★★★★★
Reliability	★★★★★
Green rating	★★★★★

to tame a fast and winding route either; the ride quality is stunning for such a capable sports car and I could imagine driving a huge distance in the RCZ without feeling jaded at the other end.

The cabin is not a bad place to be either. Peugeot has made big strides here lately, opening up a lead over sister brand Citroën and arch-rival Renault.

There is also decent storage space and while the RCZ can never pretend to be more than a 2+2, it's a decent one.

Admittedly, grown-ups will struggle for headroom beneath the distinctive double-bubble rear roof; everyone said this would never be ported over from the original RCZ concept, but it has proved to be a practical way of using air flow to keep the rear screen clear of rain and crud.

The RCZ is also environmentally-friendly for a 'press on' motor; our RCZ diesel pushes out just 139g/km of CO2 and falls into road tax band-E (£110/year) and should average more than 50mpg – pretty impressive for a fun car.

Will there be a roadster to attack the TT on both fronts? Peugeot has said 'Non!', but the demand is out there.



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PROPERTY NEWS

Minister says we've seen end of the housing boom

BRITAIN'S property boom could be over for good, according to the housing minister in the Coalition Government.

Grant Shapps said homeowners should no longer rely on their houses to fund their retirement.

He said ministers were hoping to engineer an era of "house price stability" in which property values would gradually be eroded by rising earnings.

He suggested that in a 'rational' market, house prices might rise by two per cent while earnings rose by four per cent, making property more affordable over time.

The Government is trying to encourage councils and developers to build more homes to suppress the market and make it easier for first-time buyers to get on to the housing ladder.

Mr Shapps, a Conservative, said a fall in the real value of houses would ease the "horrendous" situation faced by millions of young people.

He said property should "primarily be thought of as a place to be your home" rather than as an investment.

"The main thing everyone requires for their subsistence is a roof over their head and when that basic human need becomes too expensive for average citizens to afford, something is out of kilter," he continued. "I think the answer is house-price stability."

Give careful thought to your buy-to-let choice

INVESTORS may wish to consider the location and nature of a property more carefully when taking out a buy-to-let policy, say experts.

Analysts say buy-to-let is one of the top 20 ways to profit from the current dip in the housing market, but urges people to be cautious about where and what they are buying.

According to a survey most city centres have an abundance of flats, so the best returns come from letting three and four-bedroom houses to families.

According to the findings some letting agents have experienced rises of 20 per cent in 2010, but they do not expect a great deal of capital appreciation until at least 2012.

Buy-to-let landlords may also wish to consider empty properties as potential investment.

David Ireland – chief executive of charity Empty Homes – said it is easier and cheaper to convert such dwellings than to construct new ones.



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Slight price rise is not yet a sign of market recovery

■ BY NICK AMES

THE latest house price index from the Nationwide Building Society has revealed a 0.4 per cent rise for the month of December compared with November.

The latest rise means house prices are now just 0.4 per cent higher than this time last year, with the average UK home costing £162,763.

Nationwide's chief economist Martin Gahbauer, said: "Despite December's increase, house prices have fallen in four out of the last six months and it would be premature to suggest the recent downward trend has been broken on the basis of one month's figures."

House prices came under pressure this year as a high level of instructions outstripped buyer demand.

The prediction for house prices in 2011 is for a slight fall as demand for housing is expected to stay weak as a result of the uncertainty surrounding the economy and the Government's massive spending cuts.

Some experts are predicting falls of around five per cent in 2011, while many have suggested they could fall by as much as 10 per cent.

The Council of Mortgage Lenders is predicting that the housing market will remain subdued in 2011, due to uncertainty surrounding the economy and the ongoing mortgage rationing by lenders – but is optimistic that stamp duty legislation could assist those wanting to buy for the first time.

But it says lenders must be more flexible when deciding whether to assist them onto the housing ladder.

Over recent times, demand has been weak as many buyers have adopted a "wait and see" approach as uncertainty continues to surround the economy and the Government's spending cuts make prospective buyers cautious. However, the CML is hopeful that the £250,000 stamp duty exemption for first-time buyers may provide a modest boost to sales next year – particularly as the December 2011 deadline looms.

Despite this, the fact remains that first-time buyers continue to struggle to get onto the



FLUCTUATIONS: Despite a slight rise in house prices last month most predictions are for house prices to fall

property ladder as lenders are still demanding large deposits.

With regard to house prices, the CML expects them to fall modestly or stay flat next year as the availability of mortgages continues to "remain limited". The body does not expect lending levels experienced during the housing boom to return for many years.

Mortgage approvals are currently hovering around the 47,000 a month mark – this is less

than half the level reached at the height of the housing boom in 2007.

In the meantime, the CML predicts a modest rise in mortgage arrears and repossessions.

The spokesman explained this would be to reflect "the continuing pressure on household finances, the persistence of cases of long-term arrears and the government's decision to cut help for borrowers by cutting payments of support for mortgage interest."

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MORTGAGE affordability in the UK for those looking to take their first steps onto the property ladder is at its most favourable for 12 years, according to the latest annual Halifax First Time Buyer Review.

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and 40 per cent of local authorities are affordable for first time buyers, a sevenfold increase on 2007, the report shows.

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1998 and almost half of the peak level of 50 per cent in September 2007.

This significant improvement in affordability over the past three years has been mainly driven by a combination of lower house prices and declining mortgage rates, the lender said.

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Picture: ICR KUPCO



RESHUFFLE: Ashford Town Cricket Club are in a period of transition after a tough 2010 season

Club ready to bounce back, says chairman

ASHFORD Town Cricket Club president Bill Day believes the club have laid sufficient foundations to avoid the drama which undermined last summer's campaign.

When a host of top players left the club prior to the season, the subsequent reshuffle left Ashford struggling to field competitive sides down the divisions and the exits eventually took their toll.

The club's 3rd XI, unable to fulfil their commitments in Division Five of the Kent League, were forced to withdraw midway through the season.

CRICKET

However, Ashford's first-team held their own in a competitive Division One and Day believes the determination they showed will stand the club in good stead this time around.

"We started the season in some turmoil because we'd lost a lot of very good players and it did look as though it'd be an uphill struggle," he said. "Liam Tegg, as captain, had a terrific season with the bat and he really led the thing brilliantly. The other

players watched him and took his lead and in the end, the ones who left were almost immaterial."

The future of Ashford's 3rd XI will be decided at the club's Annual General Meeting on January 26 and Day admits the team's demise last season ultimately came as no surprise.

"It was a bit of a disappointment but it's not easy to sustain all the teams in a club at all times," he said. "So often in the Kent League, clubs will have a terrific first-team, but their seconds and thirds are struggling."

MOTORSPORT



FRIENDLY RIVALRY: (l-r) Casey Stoner and Leon Camier

Camier and Stoner the best of enemies

THEY learned the trade together as teenagers and despite their careers taking different paths, Leon Camier and Casey Stoner continue to compete against each other, *writes Tom Howard*.

Kent World Superbike rider Camier and former Moto GP champion Stoner have come a long way since they set foot on the motorsport ladder, but have remained friends. Although competing in different world championships, the pair continue to learn from each other in training sessions and are keen to resume their previous on-track battles.

The duo were reunited last month for a series of training sessions at Stoner's Australian home. But it was in the British 125cc Championship a decade ago when they first met, becoming firm friends and fierce track rivals. Stoner, then 16, made the trip to Britain from Australia in 2000 to launch his superbike career, while Ashford-born Camier was embarking on only his third season of circuit racing. Stoner won the championship that year while Camier finished 12th overall. They locked horns the following season, with the Kent rider taking the title.

Since then, Stoner has risen through the Moto GP ranks, beating Valentino Rossi to the world title in 2007 at the impressive age of 21. Although Camier is yet to taste glory in the World Superbike Championship (WSB), the ex-British champion is hot on his friend's heels in training and eyeing another track meeting.

Camier said: "After the Phillip Island test last month I went up to Casey's house with my manager Andy Walker, we have all known each other since 2000. It's great we are still friends. We have been training but also having fun, but most things turn into a big competition."

"Neither of us disclose information about our bikes and we're in different classes, but we can learn about training techniques. Maybe one day soon we will be in the same championship again."

Camier's second season in the WSB with Aprilia begins at Australia's Phillip Island on February 27.

PLEASE SEND YOUR SPORTS STORIES TO SPORTS EDITOR GLENN PEARSON AT glenn.pearson@kosmedia.co.uk



REFORMATION PROCESS: Ashford Town look set to change their name as they hope to reform as a senior club in time to be able to play competitive football next season

Town set to kick-off new era under different name

ASHFORD Town will change their name in order to successfully reform as a senior football club next season.

Town, who resigned from the Ryman League last summer following a bitter legal dispute between then co-owners Don Crosbie and Tony Betteridge, have been in the process of reforming ever since.

However, as a result of discussions with the Kent County FA last week, it appears a name change is required to enable the club to reform in time for next season.

Ashford, under the ownership of Betteridge, planned to reform as Ashford Town Kent, but the name does not meet FA guidelines regarding the reformation of football clubs.

FOOTBALL

■ BY TOM HOWARD

The name has been deemed too similar to that of the former club by the Kent FA, which means the club will need to decide on a new identity.

In the coming weeks the club's committee are due to agree on a new name deemed fit for purpose to kick-start the reformation process.

Betteridge said: "We will change the name. As a club we are in a difficult situation because whatever we do will probably upset someone."

"If we don't change the name it will create problems for us so we have to consider a name change. I was reluctant to change the name

because nobody likes change, but we have to because we are a new entity."

"I do believe that everything we do will be the best way to take things forward. The Kent FA have not given us a selection of names, but we have put forward suggestions."

"I am not unhappy with the choices for names. Until the name is agreed we cannot start the first initial process, but we are in a very good position."

"The name we will select will be acceptable because it will be different enough from the original. If the Kent FA are not happy with the choice then we will have to change it, but we don't expect that."

Betteridge is pleased with the progress the club has made and is expecting to make a further announcement regarding the club's new identity in the coming weeks.

Picture: ICR KUPCO

Barham all clear to putt career back on course

GOLF

■ BY TOM HOWARD

PROFESSIONAL golfer Benn Barham intends to make a competitive return to the course in March as he bravely steps up his recovery from a cancer scare at the end of last year.

The former European Tour golfer has been on the sidelines after undergoing an operation to remove a kidney containing a cancerous tumour in November. Since going under the knife, the Tenterden-based player has received the all-clear and is already planning his return to the European Challenge Tour.

Progress

Barham has worked hard on his fitness during the last month and has even managed to aid his recovery by completing nine holes at Chart Hills in Biddenden.

The 34-year-old is pleased with his progress and says he is confident he will return to the European Challenge Tour at the Kenya Open, which begins on March 31.

Barham said: "The rehab is going okay. My coach has set me a programme which I have been working on at the gym and I've even managed to get nine holes in here and there at Chart Hills. I'm seeing the shots but not quite hitting them at the moment, but that will come



Picture: ADY KERRY

ROAD TO RECOVERY: Benn Barham has been working hard as he looks to return from his battle with cancer

with time. I've been hitting some good tee shots and my putting has been good.

"I've had a few aches and pains but on the whole things are going well. I hope to be at the Kenya Open, but if I receive any invites to tournaments before then, I may play in those depending on how I feel."

Although he may have to wait another two months to make his comeback, Barham took part in the Ponte Vecchio Golf Challenge in Italy a week before Christmas. The exhibition

event saw 13 professional golfers, including Robert Karlsson, hit shots from the Ponte Vecchio Bridge at floating targets located in the River Arno in Florence. The competition was won by Spaniard Alejandro Canizares.

Barham said: "I wasn't sure whether or not to go but I only had to hit 40 shots in the tournament and in the end it turned out to be a bit of a holiday break, mixed with a bit of work. Unfortunately I didn't make it out of the group stage, but it was a good event."

FOOTBALL



STEP SIX BID: Bromley Green (in blue)

Ground inspection holds key to new league for Green

BROMLEY Green will welcome the ground graders on Friday after throwing their hat into the ring for inclusion in next season's newly-formed step six division.

A total of 28 clubs have applied to join the league, which will provide a link between the Kent League and the Kent County League, and Green patron Dave Homewood accepts they face a challenge to be selected.

The club's Swan Ground would not meet league requirements without significant investment and planning permission, although Homewood feels they have nothing to lose by applying.

He said: "We're interested in pursuing it but there's clearly a long way to go for us and a lot of fellow applicants."

"We have always been ambitious but we've never found the right land to develop our facilities. We'd need an enclosed ground with floodlights and our ground doesn't have the potential."

"Of all the applicants, 24 are the same as us, they don't have the right facilities, but of course you can't win it if you're not in it. We've got the infrastructure, the background and the finances and the club's very solvent, but we haven't got the land."

Whether or not Bromley Green are chosen for step six, they have designs on leaving Division One East behind them next season after a strong first-half to the campaign.

Green beat University of Kent 3-2 on Saturday to move within a point of leaders APM and Homewood is keen to see his club make the step up.

He said: "It's important for the club to go up that extra notch because that's where we used to be and that's where we're more comfortable."

"We're very pleased so far, we've got five teams at the moment and they're all in the running for honours. It's been positive and the real thrust is the first-team gaining promotion to the Premier Division."

LEAGUE TABLE

(Not including midweek games)

KENT LEAGUE PREMIER DIVISION

	P	W	D	L	Gd	Pt
1 Herne Bay	15	9	5	1	+14	32
2 Erith Town	14	7	4	3	+25	47
3 VCD Athletic	12	7	4	1	+7	25
4 Hythe Town	12	7	2	3	+10	23
5 Beckenham Town	13	7	2	4	+6	23
6 Greenwich Borough	11	7	0	4	+17	21
7 Norton Sports	13	4	6	3	+1	18
8 Sevenoaks Town	12	5	1	6	-3	16
9 Deal Town	14	5	1	8	-10	16
10 Tunbridge Wells	10	4	3	3	+8	15
11 Fisher	13	4	2	7	-6	14
12 Erith & Belvedere	10	4	1	5	-1	13
13 Holmesdale	15	2	6	7	-9	12
14 Lordswood	14	3	2	9	-9	11
15 Corinthian	12	3	2	7	-9	11
16 Sporting Bengal United	14	3	1	10	-25	10

KENT COUNTY LEAGUE DIVISION ONE EAST

1 APM	8	5	3	0	+17	18
2 Bromley Green	8	5	2	1	+13	17
3 Bredhurst Juniors	8	5	3	0	+10	17
4 Staplehurst & Monarchs	9	4	3	2	+8	15
5 Sheerness East	8	4	2	2	+7	14
6 Premier	7	4	0	3	+3	12
7 Otford United	7	3	3	1	+2	12
8 Milton & Fulston	12	3	3	6	-10	12
9 New Romney	9	2	3	4	-3	9
10 Sheppey United	8	2	2	4	-6	8
11 Larkfield & New Hythe	10	0	4	6	-11	4
12 Kennington	8	1	1	6	-24	4
13 University of Kent	6	1	1	4	-6	3

FIXTURES (Saturday):

KENT SENIOR TROPHY: Norton Sports v **Hythe Town**
KENT COUNTY LEAGUE DIVISION ONE EAST: **Bromley Green** v Sheerness East; University of Kent v **Kennington**

Town seek striker to add to touch of Cass up front

FOOTBALL

HYTHE Town are in talks about signing a new striker to take some of the goal-scoring responsibility off top-scorer Brendon Cass.

If all goes to plan the latest addition to the squad could be in place before Saturday's rearranged trip to Norton Sports in the Kent Senior Trophy.

Scott Porter, Town's boss, is happy with Cass, who has 17 goals in all competitions, but feels his side are in need of some added firepower in the second-half of the season.

He said: "We're looking at bringing another forward in, I think we need one to bolster things up."

"We've got everything else we need in other positions, Brendon's been doing a great job up there on his own because Gary Mickelborough's not been well and Craig Thompson's been a bit hit and miss."

"We're lacking a bit of confidence in front of goal and bringing someone new in might give everyone a lift."

Hythe endured another blank weekend as their trip to Norton on Saturday was postponed due to a waterlogged pitch. To make matters worse, Herne Bay's trip to Deal Town went ahead and a 2-0 win took them nine points ahead of Porter's side, who have three games in hand.

Hythe's focus for the moment is still distracted by cup competitions, with their two-legged League Cup quarter-final against Sevenoaks Town beginning at Greatness Park last night, log on to www.yourashford.co.uk for the details.



Picture: IGOR KUPCO

LONE STRIKER: Hythe are seeking a new forward to take some of the pressure off top-scorer Brendon Cass

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